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A PARLIAMENT OF PARLIAMENTS¹

FELIX ADLER

Leader, Ethical Culture Society, New York

I HAVE in mind a suggestion somewhat analogous to the plan of international legislation and administration just set before us, though less comprehensive. To discuss intelligently the elaborate plan of Mr. Snow, it would be necessary to study it in detail. But before hearing his paper I had in mind the idea of a parliament of parliaments, a kind of super-parliament to be elected by the different parliaments of the world. The understanding would be that each of the national delegations to the parliament of parliaments would consist of persons representing the different social groups within the nation—laborers, manufacturers, merchants, scientists etc., to the end that the relations of people to people should be removed from the control, at least the exclusive control, of the diplomatic agents who have hitherto administered foreign affairs, and that these relations should be placed in the hands of the people themselves.

I happened to be in London some time before the outbreak of the war, and there I gained a distinct impression of the tense feeling existing between England and Germany, and also of the very promising efforts that were being made in important quarters to bring about a more friendly attitude of mind. I cannot help thinking that if a parliament of this kind had existed, if there had been some such international conference body, the war might have been averted. I agree with Mr. Snow that the use of physical force should be denied the international congress, that it should depend entirely on the moral force it can exercise. I am convinced that this force is bound to be exceedingly great. If such a body had been assembled

¹ Discussion at the National Conference on Foreign Relations of the United States, held under the auspices of the Academy of Political Science, at Long Beach, N. Y., May 29, 1917.

before the war; if English workingmen could have been brought face to face with German workingmen, English merchants with German merchants; if they had had the opportunity to talk matters out, instead of negotiating through secondary diplomatic channels; if the people who must "pay the piper" had come together and directly faced each other, we might have been spared this terrible catastrophe. So the first suggestion is a parliament or international conference, to consist of national delegations, including representatives of the different social groups within each nation. These delegations need not number more than twenty-five or thirty persons each. The entire body would not be unmanageably large. Our parliaments and congresses at present consist of five to six hundred members.

The next point I wish to speak of is that besides preventing controversies from reaching the acute stage, a parliament of parliaments, an elixir of parliaments such as is here proposed, would properly undertake the important function of international legislation—a function that is apt to be minimized whenever a court or a league to enforce peace is offered as the principal remedy.

I cannot persuade myself that the development of international law can safely be intrusted to a court. I speak with due diffidence in the presence of distinguished jurists, but it seems to me as a layman that it is the court's affair not to make but to interpret law, and that the law should be made by the people. Professor Moore, in his remarks on the judicial function of arbitration bodies, alluded pointedly and with some pride to the fact that they had been accustomed to base their decisions on precedent. But is not this the very circumstance that would seem to make them unfit to take over the function of international law making? For the world today is confronted by problems such as Grotius and Vattel did not have to meet. The international legislator today will have to deal with new situations to which precedent affords no parallel, and in dealing with which reliance on precedent will be a hindrance rather than a help. There are the great questions of colonial expansion, of the freedom of the seas, of the open door with

regard to backward races—not indeed the “open door” through which all the exploiters of Europe and America can enter on equal terms, but the open door of opportunity for those backward races themselves, so that they may be reasonably protected in the effort to develop along the lines of their own capacities and their own gifts.

An international legislature would have to address itself to all these great problems of the relations of people to people, not only of the civilized peoples of the world to the less civilized, of those civilized in some directions and less civilized in others, but of the civilized world at large to the infant races. We have been told that in Africa during the last century ten million of the natives fell victims to the civilizing solicitude of the white race. It is such conditions as these that cry loudly for a change of mental attitude—yes, for a change of heart on our part. And I for one do not see how reliance can be placed either upon a league to enforce peace, if such a league be indeed practicable, or upon a mere court to establish the kind of international law which the world needs and which the world court shall administer and interpret.

There is one other point upon which I wish to dwell for a moment. It is that perhaps not sufficient attention has been paid to the psychology of peace and war. How will it avail us to construct ingenious devices, courts, legislatures and the like, without penetrating somewhat deeper and considering the psychic factors that operate in the minds of nations, the motives to which we can appeal in the interests of peace? We know well the psychic factors that breed war—national pride, economic greed and the like. These hostile forces, these engenderers of hate, have been fully described. But what are the psychic factors upon which we can rely as our allies in binding up the wounds of nations, and conciliating their enmities? We are accustomed to speak of “The Allies” just now. I want to speak of those spiritual allies upon whom above all we must depend, to whom above all we must appeal after the Great War shall have burned itself out. Now I hope that you will not think me too idealistic if I say that it is after all a spiritual factor that we must rely upon—not self-interest, not even

pity or sympathy, for both self-interest and pity have failed us in the hour of need. Just before the war it was confidently prophesied that there never could be another war, because of the economic injury which the victor would sustain as well as the vanquished. And then the war came to mock these prophecies. Nor will pity suffice as a deterrent; for have not individuals and whole nations, in an ecstasy of self-sacrifice, been willing to forget the sufferings they inflict on others in view of the burden of suffering which they are prepared to accept for themselves? No; it is the moral factor upon which we must depend, however slowly the world may be educated up to it; and by the moral factor I mean simply the idea contained in the word "right."

The fundamental question to my mind is, How can we bring it about that the unequal nations, the nations that are actually unequal, that is superior in numbers, in wealth, in civilization or what counts as such—that these nations, I say, shall regard little Belgium and little Persia and little Greece as their equals? Herein lies the very essence of the problem—how to make the actually unequal, the superior, admit the equality of those who yet in some sense, namely morally, are their equals.

Now the answer in the case of nations is the same as in the case of individuals. An individual is my equal, though he be inferior in wealth or intelligence, because of his moral personality, because he has certain rights which I am bound to respect. And these rights, when analyzed, come to the simple proposition that he has the right of a moral personality, the right of self-development, because there is in him something that is worth developing. In other words, the conception of right reduced to its lowest terms involves the idea that every human being has something to contribute, something that the world cannot do without, something that mankind cannot afford to miss.

Now apply the same thing to Belgium and Persia and Greece. There is something in each of these nations, a type of civilization, a type of culture, to be developed, which is worthy of the respect and admiration of the rest. They are the equals of the greatest countries because there is something in them unlike

that which these greater countries have produced or can produce, which yet humanity at large has an interest in conserving, and where it is latent, in educating. This is what I mean by the moral factor—the factor of right. And in order to make that effective, I recur once more in closing my remarks to the parliament of parliaments. Assume that a state of war is about to be declared, the purpose being to violate the principle of right. Germany is about to violate Belgium's rights, Russia and England are about to violate Persia's rights. The parliament of parliaments is convoked, the nations sit in great conclave. Little Belgium and little Persia stand up in the persons of their national delegations, and, speaking with their own voice, and with that impressiveness, that constraining effect that belongs to the moral nature when it finds utterance, Belgium and Persia will declare their rights, and the nations sitting around will say, "Well done; we approve." And then there will be a true world opinion in favor of Belgium and in favor of Persia, and the mighty nations that attempt to violate those rights will not succeed in doing so, because a true and genuine world opinion such as does not exist at present will stand in the way, a bar they cannot overleap.

The President has spoken of world opinion, but at this moment there is no such thing. There is the opinion of the Central Powers and the opinion of the Allied Powers—mutually contradictory. What we need is a body like the parliament of parliaments to generate a world opinion, a genuine world opinion; and one, which, when it has once gained expression, no nation on earth will be strong enough to resist.